

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

For the convenience of the Examiner, all claims have been presented whether or not an amendment has been made. The claims have been amended as follows:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A method of using a public communications network to manage the return of an item purchased by a consumer from a remote direct merchandiser, comprising the steps of:

receiving a first communication at a returns manager system, the first communication comprising return request data from a local returns site;

providing a second communication from the returns manager system to the local returns site, the second communication comprising return validation data having at least a return validation code;

validating the return by matching the return validation code with a pre-authorization code provided by the consumer to the local returns site, the pre-authorization code obtained by the consumer and indicating prior approval of the return by a remote direct merchandiser from whom the item was purchased; and

crediting an account of the consumer for a return value of the returned item after validating the return;

wherein the first and second communications are communicated using a public communications network.

2. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the public communications network is the Internet.

3. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the public communications network is the public telephone network.

4. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the public communications network is a combination of Internet access and public telephone access.

5.     **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising:  
receiving a third communication at the returns manager system, the third communication comprising a request for general returns information from the consumer; and  
providing a fourth communication from the returns manager system to the consumer, the fourth communication comprising data representing general returns information.
6.     **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 5, wherein the third and fourth communications are communicated using a website.
7.     **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of accessing return policy data representing disposal of the item as desired by the direct merchandiser.
8.     **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of providing a returns validation code to the consumer prior to the step of receiving return request data from the local returns site.
9.     **(Original)** The method of Claim 8, wherein the step of providing a return validation code to the consumer is performed using a website accessed by the consumer.
10.    **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the steps of receiving return request data and of providing return validation data are performed using a website.

11. **(Currently Amended)** A method of using a public communications network to manage the return of an item purchased by a consumer from a remote direct merchandiser, comprising the steps of:

receiving a first communication at a returns manager system, the first communication comprising return request data from a local shipper;

providing a second communication from the returns manager system to the local shipper, the second communication comprising return validation data having at least a return validation code;

validating the return by matching the return validation code with a pre-authorization code provided by the consumer to the local returns site, the pre-authorization code obtained by the consumer and indicating prior approval of the return by a remote direct merchandiser from whom the item was purchased; and

crediting an account of the consumer for a return value of the returned item after validating the return;

wherein the first and second communications are communicated using a public communications network.

12. **(Original)** The method of Claim 11, wherein the public communications network is the Internet.

13. **(Original)** The method of Claim 11, wherein the public communications network is the public telephone network.

14. **(Original)** The method of Claim 11, wherein the public communications network is a combination of Internet access and public telephone access.

15. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 11, further comprising:  
receiving a third communication at the returns manager system, the third communication comprising a request for general returns information from the consumer; and  
providing a fourth communication from the returns manager system to the consumer, the fourth communication comprising data representing general returns information.

16. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 15, wherein the third and fourth communications are communicated using a website.

17. **(Original)** The method of Claim 11, further comprising the step of accessing return policy data representing disposal of the item as desired by the direct merchandiser.

18. **(Original)** The method of Claim 11, further comprising the step of providing a returns validation code to the consumer prior to the step of receiving return request data from the local shipper.

19. **(Original)** The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of providing a return validation code to the consumer is performed using a website accessed by the consumer.

20. **(Original)** The method of Claim 11, wherein the steps of receiving return request data and of providing return validation data are performed using a website.

21. **(Currently Amended)** A method for managing a return of an item, comprising:

receiving, at a local returns site, a returned item purchased from an off-site retailer by a consumer;

accessing using a public communication network to access, from the local returns site, a returns manager system that stores a return policy of the off-site retailer, the return policy comprising one or more return guidelines that must be met to validate a return of the returned item, a one of the one or more return guidelines requiring that preauthorization of the returned item is obtained by the consumer before the returned item is received at the local returns site, the preauthorization indicating prior approval of the return by a remote direct merchandiser from whom the item was purchased;

validating the return by determining that the return guidelines are met by the returned item; and

crediting an account of the consumer for a return value of the returned item after validating the return.

22. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 21, wherein receiving the returned item comprises receiving the returned item at a local returns site, the local returns site off-site from the retailer.

23. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 22, further comprising:  
providing pre-authorization of the return to the consumer before the item is received at the local returns site.

24. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 21, wherein receiving the returned item comprises receiving the returned item by a local shipper who communicates directly with the consumer.

25. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 21, wherein accessing a returns manager system comprises:

transmitting a first communication comprising return request data to the returns manager system;

receiving a second communication comprising return validation data from the returns manager system, the return validation data comprising a return validation code.

26. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 25, where the return request data comprises a pre-authorization code provided to the returns manager system by the consumer.

27. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 21, further comprising:  
accessing a rules-based disposition policy associated with the off-site retailer; and  
selecting a disposition method for the returned product based on the rules-based disposition policy associated with the retailer.

28. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 21, further comprising sending a communication from the returns manager system to the retailer identifying the item being returned by the consumer.

29. **(Currently Amended)** A system for managing a return of merchandise, comprising:

a retailer comprising ~~at least one remote~~ a remote direct merchandiser from which one or more items may be purchased by a consumer;

a returns manager system communicatively coupled to the retailer over a public communications network, the returns manager system operable to:

receive a first communication identifying ~~a return from a consumer, the return comprising~~ at least ~~a returned~~ an item of merchandise to be returned by the consumer in the future;

identify the retailer as the remote direct merchandiser from which the at least one returned item was purchased by the consumer ~~[associated with the return]~~; and

send a second communication to the retailer identifying the ~~return . . . .~~ item of merchandise to be returned by the consumer to provide the retailer with advance notification of the return.

30. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 29, wherein the retailer is operable to:

receive the notification of the return of the item; and

update an accounting to reflect the status of the item as return pending.

31. **(Currently Amended)** The system of Claim 29, wherein the first communication is received from a local returns site communicatively coupled to the returns manager ~~system~~ system.

32. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 31, wherein the local returns site is operable to receive the returned item from the consumer.

33. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 31, wherein the local returns site is operable to receive the returned item from a shipper.

34. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 31, wherein the local returns site is operable to process the returned item.

35. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 31, wherein the returns manager system is further operable to:

receive a third communication from the local returns site, the third communication comprising return validation data;

transmit a fourth communication to the local returns site, the fourth communication comprising return validation data having at least a return validation code.

36. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 35, wherein the local returns site is further operable to:

validate the return by matching the return validation code with a pre-authorization code provided by the consumer; and

credit an account of the consumer for a return value of the returned item after validating the return.

37. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 29, wherein the public communications network comprises an Internet, the first and second communications transmitted over the Internet.

38. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 29, wherein the public communications network comprises a telephone network, the first and second communications transmitted over the telephone network.

39. **(Previously Presented)** The system of Claim 29, wherein the first communication identifies an order associated with the returned item.